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It was maintained that socialization in middle-class families prepared youth to compete successfully in school while in lower-class families, children were not trained to conform to academic (formal) and social (informal) requirements of the school.

Frustration arose from status deprivation among the lower classes in their activities in both the formal and informal aspects of the school. The student had two basic alternatives, depending on his attitude towards his failure. If he blamed the system, he would most likely join a delinquent gang. If he blamed himself he would drop out. When an adolescent assumed personal responsibility for his status deprivation, the probability of dropping out was maximized, especially if there was significant contact with other dropouts and little educational support from his family.

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CAPABLE DROPOUTS AND THE SOCIAL MILIEU OF THE HIGH SCHOOL

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CAPABLE DROPOUTS AND THE SOCIAL MILIEU OF THE HIGH SCHOOL

There has been a growing concern in recent years over the number of students who leave school prior to high school graduation; school dropout is considered a potential waste of human resources. Many studies have been conducted, and while the estimates vary, some studies suggest that as many as three-fourths of those who drop out of high school have the requisite ability to do passing or even superior work.[1] The typical explanations, involving emphasis on such factors as limited intelligence, poor reading ability, and grade retardation do not apply to these intellectually capable dropouts.[2]

In this paper a conceptual framework is presented which attempts to explain why capable students leave school. The basic premise is that dropout is a response to the status deprivation experienced by lower-class youth when they compete with middle-class adolescents under circumstances favoring those with a middle-class background. This theoretical explanation integrates and extends two different, though related, emphases on status deprivation or status frustration. Current theories of delinquency stress the status deprivation arising in the formal or academic system of the high school; in analyses of American youth culture, there is a comparable emphasis on the status frustration experienced by adolescents in the social system of the school, which comprises the informal network of peers and participation in informal and extra-curricular activities. This formulation implies, then, a direct

relationship between socio-economic status and school dropout.

The Class Distribution of Capable Dropouts

In a review of twenty studies of dropouts, Tesseneer reports that the characteristic which most clearly and consistently distinguishes dropouts from high school graduates is the dropouts' lower socio-economic position in the community. These investigations indicated that from 72 to 84 per cent of all dropouts are from low income families.[3] Similarly, in a study of "Elmtown's" youth Hollingshead found that class position is significantly related to the dropout rate, and this could not be explained by the age and sex composition of his sample.[4] However, in this cross-tabulation he did not differentiate between intellectually capable dropouts and those who are retarded, i.e., those who do not have the requisite ability for promotion to higher grades and eventual graduation.[5] Hollingshead reported intelligence test scores by social class, however, and indicated that none of the 507 students who entered high school in Elmtown in the fall of 1941, at the beginning of the study period, had "defective" intelligence.[6] He also provided the frequency distribution by social class of the 390 students who were still enrolled in high school in the spring of 1942. Table I was constructed from these distributions.

These data demonstrates that class position is strongly associated with whether an adolescent continues in school or drops out. All of the adolescents in the two highest classes were still in school, as were 95 per cent of those in class III. In class IV approximately 80 per cent were in school, but in the lowest class less than 30 per cent remained

in school. The conclusion is inescapable that the social class to which intellectually capable adolescents belong is highly related to the rate of dropout.

This relationship between social class and dropout has also been reported by other investigators.[7] Hathaway and Monachesi report that among the families of day-laborers 38 per cent of the boys and 32 per cent of the girls drop out before completing high school. In contrast, the dropout rate for children from professional families is 5 per cent.[8] Similarly, in Rochester, New York, it was found that more than one-third of the dropouts came from families on welfare.[9]

Space does not permit extensive documentation, but it may be noted that within the lower class, dropout rates are very high among certain minority groups. For example, Schreiber reports that the rate of dropout among Negro, Spanish-American and American Indian youth is two to four times higher than it is among Caucasians.[10]

Status Deprivation

Writers in the field of deviance have long recognized a similar class differential with respect to delinquency. Several theories of delinquency have emphasized the disparity between the culturally induced aspirations of lower-class youth and the socially structured means available for realizing these aspirations.[11] The class differential is accounted for in terms of the "status deprivation" experienced by lower-class youth when they are forced to compete with middle-class adolescents under circumstances favoring those with a middle-class background. Such theories assume that lower-class youth have accepted the desirability of

some upward mobility. This explanation of dropout on the part of capable students posits that dropout, like delinquency, is a response to the frustration produced by this type of status competition.

This explanation also assumes that, in their socialization practices, the lower and middle classes emphasize different values. This is of crucial importance in determining the adolescent's success in and response to the educational system. In the middle class there is particular emphasis on order and discipline, and interest in intellectual achievement is cultivated.[12] The dominant set of status criteria emphasize the personal qualities and achievements that facilitate upward mobility. Middle-class socialization aims to inculcate ambition, a pattern of deferred gratification, an ethic of individual responsibility, the possession of certain skills, especially those valuable in academic, economic, and occupational endeavors, the cultivation of manners, courtesy, and personableness, and the control of emotional expression, physical aggression, and violence.[13]

In contrast, Miller suggests that the beliefs and values of lower-class culture are focused upon such things as: avoidance of trouble or involvement with authorities of official agencies; development of physical prowess, masculinity and toughness; skill in duping or outsmarting others; a search for excitement and stimulation to break the dull routine of lower-class life; a philosophy which emphasizes luck and fate and a minimum of personal control over one's destiny; and a desire for autonomy and independence from external controls.[14] The "status deprivation" explanation emphasizes such differences in middle- and lower-class cultures, maintaining that they are responsible for the kind of adjustment made to

the school environment.

Academic Status

In most high schools, youth from diverse socio-economic backgrounds are thrown together and forced to compete as equals. Status, measured primarily in terms of grades and academic success, is awarded on the basis of middle-class standards. There are at least three reasons why status in the school is measured by middle-class standards. First, the teacher is hired to foster the development of middle-class aspirations, character, skills, and manners. Second, the teacher is almost certain to be a middle-class person. Third, the "structural imperatives" of the school favor the quiet, cooperative, "well-behaved" pupils who make the teachers' job easier, and disapprove of the boisterous youngsters who destroy order, routine, and predictability in the classroom.[15]

The socialization of lower-class youth does not adequately prepare them to perform according to the requirements of middle-class institutions such as the school. While many lower-class youth may have the requisite ability to succeed at school, in the sense of doing passing work, they are more likely to be defined as "problem children" because their values, attitudes, modes of expression, vocabulary, and perhaps clothing styles differ sharply from those of middle class teachers. Cohen's description of the situation at school is pertinent:

> The most serious problems, from the standpoint of the teacher, are those children who are restless and unruly, who fidget and squirm, who annoy and distract, who create "discipline" problems. The "good" children are the

> studious, the obedient, the docile. It is precisely the [lower-class] children who are most likely to be "problems" because of their relative lack of training in order and discipline, their lack of interest in intellectual achievement and their lack of reinforcement by the home in conformity to the requirements of the school. Both in terms of "conduct" and in terms of academic achievement, the failures in the classroom are drawn disproportionately from the lower social class levels.[16]

In lower-class families, children are not trained to conform to the requirements of the school. In the school, however, they must compete for status with middle-class youth; consequently, they find themselves at the bottom of the formal status hierarchy. By law, the failures in this competition at school are not allowed to withdraw, but are forced to "play the game" with little hope of ever succeeding. The result of this situation has been described by Troyer:

> It is here that, day after day, most of the children in the lower fourth of the [socio-economic] distribution have their sense of worth destroyed, developed feelings of insecurity, become frustrated and lose confidence in their ability to learn even that which they are capable of learning.[17]

Cohen and others who have described the status frustration and deprivation experienced by lower-class youth at school have been concerned primarily with status in the formal system of the school, that is, status as defined by teachers and school administrators. More specifically, they have focused upon status deprivation among lower-class youth which

results from their recognition of limited opportunities to achieve their occupational and educational aspirations. These adolescents feel that they are effectively blocked from achieving high goals in the future. In effect, they are involved in a vicious circle. Lower-class socialization does not produce school-oriented children. Being poorly prepared, they fail to obtain status in the formal hierarchy of the school where status is measured primarily in terms of grades and academic success.

Social Status

The academic system comprises only one part of the social structure of the school; it is, therefore, not the only source of status deprivation. The recent works of Coleman and Gordon suggest that thwarted social aspirations within the informal network of peers are of equal, if not greater, importance as a source of status deprivation.[18] These writers found that the dominant orientation of students was toward the establishment of the highest possible position in the informal status hierarchy, rather than toward status with teachers and administrators. Students were found to be highly conscious of status differences with respect to the positions in the informal groups. Gordon reports that the informal sub-system of cliques, gangs, and fraternities was particularly important in controlling adolescent behavior, not only in such matters as dating and styles of dress, but also in school achievement and deportment. He concluded that aggressive behavior and conflict centered in the efforts of students, particularly boys, to meet the expectations of their peers.[19]

While the informal status criteria used by adolescents are quite different from the formal standards of teachers and administrators, they

are also criteria which favor those with a middle-class background. The available research indicates that the adolescent peer group stresses the importance of such things as styles of dress, manners, morals, money, leisure, access to an automobile, and kindred possessions, with the result that middle-class youth enjoy a great advantage within this informal network.[20]

One may argue, therefore, that the socialization of lower-class youth does not adequately prepare them for the competition in either the formal or informal systems of the school, and, assuming that they aspire, they are systematically blocked from achieving their aspirations in both of these areas.

Youth experiencing status deprivation in one or both of these areas find school to be a very frustrating experience and are under pressure to find some solution to their status problems. Dropout is one such solution. It is postulated that status deprivation experienced in the informal structure creates greater pressures to drop out than does status deprivation in the formal system. First of all, the inability to achieve one's social aspirations presents an immediate problem, while for those with high aspirations, limited academic success leads to an anticipated failure in the occupation to which they aspire. For those with less lofty occupational aspirations, the achievement of an outstanding academic record is not essential. Average or passing grades may be perceived as all that is required, for example, for post-graduation entrance into a trade apprenticeship. Such adolescents will, however, experience status deprivation in the academic system if they are not passing. In addition, previous research indicates that peer relations assume increasing

importance as one progresses through junior and senior high school.[21] Difficulties with grades and problems of academic success in the formal system of the school are of greater significance for eighth and ninth graders, while problems in the informal system become increasingly important in later school years.

The Response to Status Deprivation

Not all youth who experience status deprivation in one or both of the systems of the school will choose to drop out as a solution to this problem. Leaving school is only one of several possible alternatives. Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin suggest that a delinquent subculture also offers a solution to this kind of problem by establishing a new set of status criteria which lower-class youth can meet successfully.

The way in which a person explains his failure largely determines his response to it.[22] Adolescents who have experienced a marked discrepancy between aspirations and achievement may attribute their difficulties to the existence of unjust or arbitrary criteria for awarding status at school. On the other hand, they may attribute their troubles to their own personal inadequacies and consequently recognize the need to revise their aspirations rather than to change the rules and norms of the system. It is suggested that the dropout withdraws because he has accepted the school's definition of him as inadequate. Assuming personal responsibility for his status problem, he is likely to lower his aspirations for future adult status and to avoid direct competition with middle-class youth. He may seek to establish himself socially as an adult within the lower-class community where he can compete more successfully.

Dropping out of school is a direct solution to problems of status deprivation and does not require the development of an elaborate group rationalization for failure. The dropout is not necessarily "anti-social" or alienated from middle-class norms, for he is not "fighting-the-system," but retreating and escaping from its frustrations.

Differential Association

It has been argued that the decision to drop out of school is contingent upon an individual's explanation of his failure; obviously, it is also dependent upon his knowledge of and familiarity with this alternative. If an individual has no contact or association with dropouts, this may not be a real alternative for him. He must learn that leaving school will solve many of his problems, and the most obvious sources are interpersonal contacts with peers who are out of school or members of one's family. Association with boys who have dropped out of school provides the individual with some perception of the relative advantages of being out of school, and dropping out may then become a real alternative. Parents and older siblings can also perform this task. Through contact with others who have dropped out, one not only learns of this alternative, but may receive some group support--perhaps even group pressure--for this action. Therefore, the probabilities of accepting dropout as a solution are maximized when the individual has contacts with persons who have dropped out, which would include parents and siblings who never finished school and do not value education highly.

Parental Support for Education

One additional factor relative to leaving school is implicit in the discussion of lower- and middle-class values--the social-psychological support for education in the home. The values of lower-class culture may create a situation in the home conducive to leaving high school prior to graduation. Education is not as highly valued in lower-class culture as it is among middle-class persons; consequently, school may be defined as a waste of time.[23] Boys may even be encouraged to leave home and to provide for themselves or at least contribute to the family's income. The adolescent's parents or the adults in his home may subtlely or directly encourage him to quit school in order to go to work to supplement or to increase the family's income. When one considers a situation where an adolescent receives positive encouragement for quitting school or receives no support from family or relatives for continuing his educational training, it is understandable why some adolescents who are intellectually capable fail to perceive any value in their school experiences and want to drop out of school.

Discussion

Attention has been focused upon an explanation of capable dropouts--those students who have the requisite ability to do passing or even superior work, but leave school prior to high school graduation. Five separate hypotheses are implicit in this analysis. These are:

Hypothesis (1): Students who experience status deprivation in the informal system of the school will be more likely to drop out than students who do not experience

this kind of status deprivation.

Hypothesis (2): Students who experience status deprivation in the formal system of the school will be more likely to drop out than students who do not experience this kind of status deprivation.

Hypothesis (3): Students who attribute their frustration and failure in the formal and informal systems of the school to their own personal inadequacies will be more likely to drop out than will those who blame the system for their difficulties.

Hypothesis (4): Students who associate with peers or adults who have dropped out of school will be more likely to drop out than students who have not associated with dropouts.

Hypothesis (5): Students who lack educational support from the home will be more likely to drop out than students who have adequate educational support.

These hypotheses may be combined as follows: When a lack of educational support from the home and association with dropouts are found in combination with status deprivation, for which the individual assumes personal responsibility, in the academic and informal systems of the school, the probability of dropping out of school is maximized. Conversely, if an individual comes from a home which provides strong social-psychological support for completing high school, has no meaningful associations with dropouts, and does not face status deprivation in school, the chances of his leaving school are minimized.

The third hypothesis, which pertains to direction of blame, is actually two-edged. In addition to the hypothesis presented, a prediction can be made regarding those students who experience status deprivation but reject self-blame. Since these students ascribe their academic and social difficulties to the lack of justice in the assignment of status in the school, they may feel justified in criticizing, reforming, or dissociating themselves from that system. On the personal level, they are also likely to become alienated from the established set of middle-class social norms operating in that system. In brief, it is predicted that they will become delinquent.

Delinquency is related to leaving school; to the extent that delinquency does not provide a satisfactory solution to the adolescent's status problems, he may decide to take a more direct course of action and drop out of school. Thus, those who do not succeed in gaining status through their delinquent pursuits, and are thus "double-failures," will probably drop out of school. In short, it is argued that adolescents who experience status deprivation may turn to either dropout or delinquency; this choice depends on the individual's location of blame, that is, self-blame or derogation of the system.

Each of the variables, status deprivation in the formal and informal systems of the school, association with dropouts, and educational support from the home, contributes to the probability of dropping out, but the contributions of the variables are not equal. It was postulated earlier that status deprivation experienced in the informal system created greater pressures to drop out than does status deprivation in the academic hierarchy, because the inability to achieve one's social

aspirations presents an immediate problem, while among those with high aspirations, limited academic success leads to an anticipated failure in one's future occupation and in achieving adult status goals. Further, for adolescents with lower aspirations, a mediocre academic record may not pose a threat to their occupational goals.

It is further postulated that the influences generated in the formal and informal systems of the school have the greatest impact on adolescents. Although an adolescent may not receive support for his educational endeavors from the home and may even be encouraged to leave school, academic success or satisfactory peer relations will be sufficient to keep him in school. The influences of the home and school are not mutually exclusive; however, the attitudes and actions of one's peers and teachers are of greater importance in helping to keep one in school or to hasten the decision to leave than is the presence or absence of parental support for education.

Association with dropouts is also considered to be of secondary importance in comparison with the influences originating in the school. Since dropout is perceived to be a solution to problems of status deprivation, contact with dropouts is meaningful only when a student is looking for a solution to this problem.

Asscciation with dropouts presumably has more to do with leaving school than does home support for education. The primary reason for this view is that for individuals who face status deprivation, association with dropouts provides a solution to an immediate problem, while lack of parental support for education does not.

Future research may require some revision of the relative influence assigned to status deprivation in the formal and informal systems of the school, association with dropouts, and parental support for education. For example, the beliefs and perceptions the adolescent learns in the family relative to education and the school may be of greater significance than is now recognized. In any event, this theoretical formulation has attempted to explain why capable students leave school, and it encompasses the major social-psychological variables which must be examined in such an effort.

Conclusion

Dropout on the part of intellectually capable youth occurs differentially among the various socioeconomic classes. It is maintained that socialization in middle-class families prepares youth to compete successfully in school, while in lower-class families children are not trained to conform to the academic and informal requirements of the school. Capable students leave school as a response to the status deprivation experienced in the informal network of peer relations and in the academic system of the school.

Adolescents who accept personal responsibility for their frustration and failure in school are likely to drop out. Those who attribute their failute to injustice in the assignment of status in the school's academic and social systems will be likely to become delinquent. When an adolescent accepts personal responsibility for the status deprivation he experiences, the probability of dropout is maximized if there is significant contact with dropouts and a lack of educational support from the family.

Table I

Class Position and School Dropout Among the Intellectually Capable*

		IN SCHOOL		OUT OF SCHOOL	
	Class	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
(Highest)	I	4	100.0	--	--
	II	31	100.0	--	--
	III	146	96.1	6	3.9
	IV	183	79.9	46	20.1
(Lowest)	V	26	28.6	65	71.4
	TOTAL	390	76.9	117	23.1

$x^2 = 162.72$ $P < .001$ $C = .49$ $\phi = .57$

*This table was constructed from data in August B. Hollingshead, Elmtown's Youth, New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1949, p. 175, p. 330.

FOOTNOTES

1. Edward S. Cook, Jr., "An Analysis of Factors Related to Withdrawal from High School Prior to Graduation," Journal of Educational Research, 50 (November, 1956), pp. 191-196; Edward S. Cook, Jr., "How IQ Figures in the Drop-out Problem," School Executive, 74 (September, 1954), pp. 56-57; John F. Delaney, "That Vacant High School Seat," American School Board Journal, 121 (November, 1950), pp. 22-23; Richard H. Dresher, "Factors in Voluntary Drop-outs," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 32 (January, 1954), pp. 287-289; William H. McCreary and Donald E. Kitch, "Now Hear Youth," Bulletin of the California State Department of Education, 22 (October, 1953), pp. 27-44; and U. S. Department of Labor, School and Early Employment Experience of Youth: A Report on Seven Communities, 1952-57, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin No. 1277, Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1960.
2. Harwin L. Voss, Aubrey Wendling, and Delbert S. Elliott, "Some Types of High School Dropouts," San Diego State College, August, 1964, unpublished manuscript.
3. R. A. Tesseneer and L. M. Tesseneer, "Review of the Literature on School Dropouts," Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, 42 (May, 1958), pp. 141-153.
4. August B. Hollingshead, Elmtown's Youth, New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1949, p. 14, p. 330.

5. This is an important distinction, since those who drop out early are more likely to be retarded. Cf. Voss, Wendling, and Elliott, op. cit. Hollingshead reported that in Elmtown 345 school-aged adolescents were not in school in the spring of 1942. None of them originated in classes I and II. In classes III, IV, and V, there were 12, 129, and 204, respectively. In short, at the beginning of his investigation in the fall of 1941, the following numbers of adolescents were already out of school: class III, 6; class IV, 83, and class V, 139. Hollingshead, op. cit., p. 175, p. 330.

6. The Otis Group Intelligence Test, Advanced Examination: Form A was given to all students shortly after enrollment in high school. None of the 507 adolescents who took this test scored below 70, which Hollingshead indicates is the cut-off score for "defective" or retarded cases. Hollingshead, op. cit., p. 174.

7. Edith G. Neisser, School Failures and Dropouts, Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 346, July, 1963, pp. 4-6; Division for Youth, The School Dropout Problem: Rochester, Part I, State of New York, May, 1962, pp. 9-10; Daniel Schreiber, "The Dropout and the Delinquent: Promising Practices Gleaned From a Year of Study," Phi Delta Kappan, 44 (February, 1963), pp. 215-221; Bernard A. Kaplan, "Issues in Educating the Culturally Disadvantaged," Phi Delta Kappan, 45 (November, 1963), pp. 70-76; and Starke R. Hathaway and Elio D. Monachesi, Adolescent Personality and Behavior: MMPI Patterns of Normal, Delinquent, Dropout, and Other Outcomes, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963, pp. 92-98.

8. Hathaway and Monachesi, op. cit., p. 93.

9. "One-third of the dropouts came from families with histories of public and private assistance. More than 40 percent were from families where there had been involvement with crime and delinquency, over half from families with histories of either welfare or crime and delinquency and 60 percent from families with a history of involvement with at least one other agency concerned with welfare, crime and delinquency, public health, board of education's special guidance and prevention of cruelty to children." Division for Youth, op. cit., pp. 9-10.
10. Schreiber, op. cit., p. 217.
11. Albert K. Cohen, Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1955; Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin, Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960.
12. Cohen, op. cit., p. 115, p. 189.
13. Albert K. Cohen and James F. Short, Jr., "Juvenile Delinquency," in Robert K. Merton and Robert A. Nisbet (eds.), Contemporary Social Problems, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961, p. 107.
14. Walter B. Miller, "Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency," The Journal of Social Issues, 14, No. 3 (1958), pp. 5-19.
15. Cohen, op. cit., pp. 113-114; cf. W. Lloyd Warner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Martin B. Loeb, Who Shall Be Educated?, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944, p. 107.
16. Cohen, op. cit., p. 115. This tendency to reward the quiet, dependable, obedient, docile youth may also help explain the higher rates of dropout among boys in comparison with girls. The academic system of the school seems to be geared to the behavior most frequently observed

among middle-class girls.

17. Maurice E. Troyer, "Squaring Evaluation Processes with Democratic Values," American Council of Education Studies, Series I, No. 34 (January, 1949), p. 42, cited in Cohen, op. cit., pp. 115-116.

18. James S. Coleman, The Adolescent Society, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961; C. Wayne Gordon, The Social System of the High School, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1957.

19. Gordon, op. cit., pp. 129-136.

20. The relationship between one's status in the informal peer groups at school and his family's socio-economic position in the community is indicated in the studies by Gordon, Coleman and Hollingshead. Cf. Gordon, op. cit., pp. 100-101; Coleman, op. cit., pp. 97-142; and Hollingshead, op. cit., pp. 208-217.

21. Coleman, op. cit.

22. Cloward and Ohlin, op. cit., p. 111.

23. Miller, op. cit.; Herbert H. Hyman, "The Value Systems of Different Classes: A Social Psychological Contribution to the Analysis of Stratification," in Reinhard Bendix and Seymour M. Lipset (eds.), Class, Status and Power, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1953, pp. 426-442; Morris Rosenberg, Occupations and Values, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1957; and Richard Centers, The Psychology of Social Classes, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949.